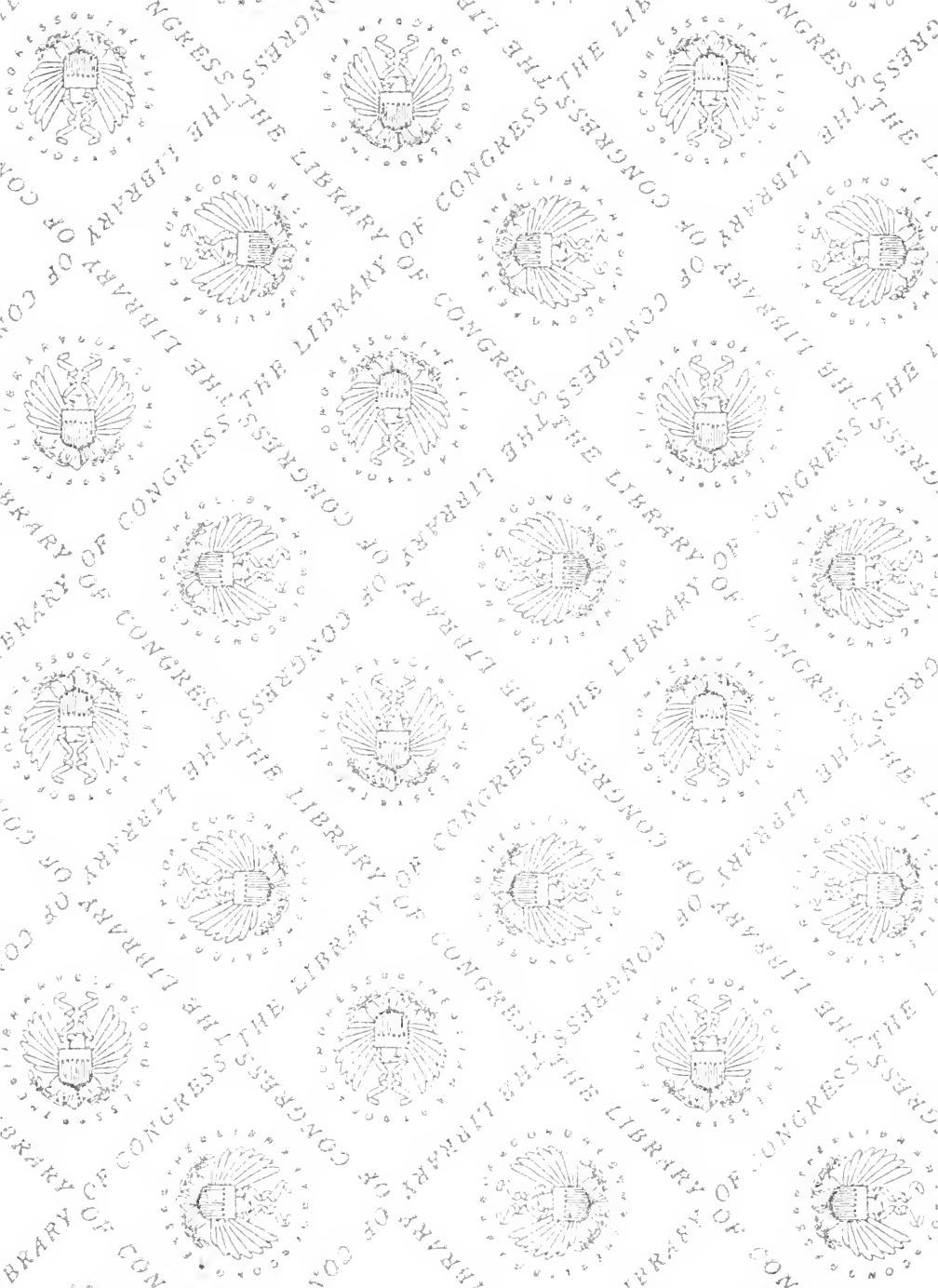
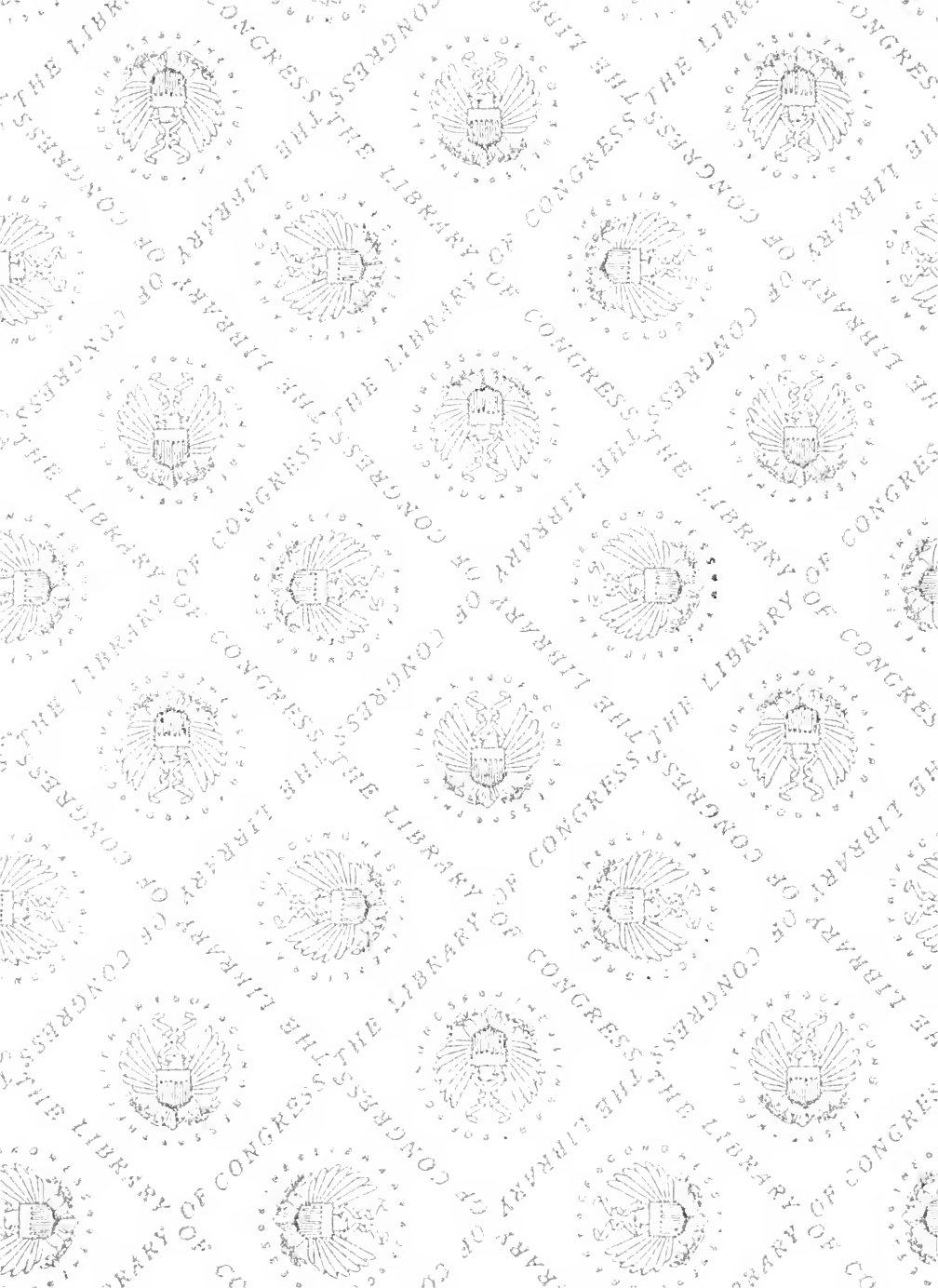


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1921





To ALFRED KREYMBORG
for much encouragement

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Three Oriental Plays

By
Frayne
Williams

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1921

By FRAYNE WILLIAMS

Two Plays for Pierrettes

Plays for Iconoclasts

Cabaret Nights and other Poems

PS3545
.I525T
192

The Rose Garden

A Play of
Oriental Philosophy
and Phantasy

The acting throughout this play is highly conventionalized. Every action being a posture and a design, at times accompanied by a quaint chord or combination of chords from the orchestra.

THE ROSE GARDEN was originally produced by The Arts Club of Chicago, February 17, 1921.

ORIGINAL CAST

WISEMAN.....GEORGE FRANCIS WOLFF
STRANGER.....ROBERT LEE ESKRIDGE
SERVING MAID.....ROSILAND WARWICK
KINGGERALD A. FRANK
MINISTER.....F. BARRY BYRNE
PHYSICIAN.....JAMES HERBERT MITCHELL
CAPTAIN.....MCCLELLAND BARCLAY
PLAYER.....OWEN JONES
HANDMAIDEN.....NAN BARCLAY
SINGER.....ROSILAN WARWICK
STRANGLER.....SPENCER K. HEAFIELD
ATTENDANT.....PRESTON VANCE
DANCER.....ARTHUR COREY
Stage Picture—

MARIE E. BLAKE AND GERALD A. FRANK
JAMES CHURCH, Director of Acting

Costumes designed and executed by
SPENCER K. HEAFIELD

Producer, MRS. RUSSELL J. MATHIAS
Assisted by MRS. ALBERT KALES

Scene is laid in ancient city of Sochi-Fu, in Chinese Turkistan; now called Yarkand—but still shows traces of Chinese occupation. It was visited by Marco Polo between the years 1271-1275.

The Prologue

THE curtain rises revealing inner curtain of dull blue.

Enter a Wiseman very richly dressed in silk robes of many shades of blue, embroidered with dull gold. He carries a rich copper lantern which is lighted, and an ebony staff. The stage is almost in gloom, but from the left side is a narrow band of orange light just level with the Wiseman's head when he is in a standing position.

He seats himself slightly to the left of the stage cross legged, facing the audience, placing his lantern on his immediate left. When he is seated he claps his hands thrice and a servitor enters with a steaming bowl of rice in a blue bowl and a smaller bowl of tea. After he leaves, a second man enters whom we will call the Stranger. He is poorly dressed—bare legs and sandals, and just a blouse of a drab cinnamon color. He seats himself slightly to the right and equal distance from the Wiseman, and he claps his hands thrice but less imperitive in manner than the former.

The servitor enters with a bowl of rice and a bowl of tea. Both the bowls are smaller than those of the Wiseman.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

The Stranger carries no staff with him, but has a small cage containing a canary. He also carries a rusty iron lantern which he places to his immediate right. The cage he places on his left.

Directly he gets his food he starts to consume it with gusto, first feeding the bird with a speck or two of rice.

The Wiseman is now partaking of his in a slow dignified manner. He takes a book from his girdle and reads by the light of his lantern. The stranger observes all this closely, stopping to eat the while. Finally the Stranger is bold enough to ask a question.

Stranger Are not the stars suspended on
 silken threads?

Wiseman No. They are suspended upon
less. If they were suspended
on silken threads, the threads
would break and send us all
crashing to eternity.

Stranger What is eternity?

Wiseman That place to which we never
 go. It is a place where there
 is neither darkness or light.

Stranger Why?

Wiseman Because if there were darkness

THE PROLOGUE

or light, we should be there, not here. Then eternity would be here, because here would be the place where we are *not*, and eternity must ever be the place where we are not.

Stranger Is this then the Truth?

Wiseman Do you find the Truth hard to seek?

Stranger I do.

Wiseman Truth is only separated from us by a rice paper screen and sometimes the paper gets torn.

Stranger And then?

Wiseman Men go mad.

Stranger Do only madmen know the truth then?

Wiseman They only know that the others do *not* know.

Stranger (*Perplexed*). Know what?

Wiseman There comes in the point desired. Know that bitter is not sweet—that suffering is not joy—nor joy pain. Sorrow not good, nor good evil—but that

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

they are all the *same thing*—all the *one thing*—but all different to different people. Are you married?

Stranger No, but I have a sweetheart.

Wiseman Thus, then, it were perhaps wiser and the essence of goodness were I to *kill* you where you sit before you perpetuate more fools of your kind. Your sweetheart would think it an evil deed, but if I delayed my action until you had been married a few years, your wife might count it a blessing. Yet my action would be the same. (*During this speech he draws a dagger from his girdle. Stranger flinches and is relieved to see him put it back*).

What do you think of the rice?

Stranger Fine.

Wiseman You see I have scarcely touched mine. *I* think it poisonous. Fine to you but poisonous to me. Yet the rice is the same. Apply

THE PROLOGUE

this to Beauty, and you get the same result. Beauty is only what it awakens in us.

Stranger (*Further perplexed*). Is nothing one thing?

Wiseman Yes,—although I'm not sure. I find Love is never Hate. It sometimes tries to be but never *is*. Hate is never Love. Neither will surrender, for so true are they to themselves and others that one would kill the other first. Thus Love kills Hate, and Hate kills Love.

(The Wiseman indicates that he wishes the rice bowls removed. Attendant does so. Wiseman picks up his lantern and starts to go).

Stranger (*Doing likewise and overtaking him on right of stage*).. Alas. What then is life?

Wiseman (*Pausing*). Life. Life is less than nothing. Life is Death. Death is Life. Death is sometimes welcome. Life never is. All the lives in the world and

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

since the world began amount to not more than a grain of sand. The great are little. The little are great. But move aside for they are going to have a play here and soon.

Stranger I will, but what is a play?

Wiseman A play is that which is or that which is not, shown to those who live what is, to make them think that which is not.

Come let us hurry! (*Leads him out*).

The Play

The curtain rises to a shrill blast of trumpets at a distance. There is revealed two dull gold walls—right and left—set back about four feet from the curtain. Each takes about a third of the width of stage. The open space or middle third turns inward at right angles, making a long corridor-like room stretching away to back of stage. At the end of this room, there are three steps leading to an elevated platform.

A stretch of blue sea is seen through the open doors.

The walls of this corridor room are painted a deep rich purple. The steps to the elevated platform at back are a deep lacquer red. The elevated platform itself is black, and the floor space is entirely covered with black felt.

The right hand gold wall is bare except that a small black ebony sofa stands against it.

Against the left hand golden wall is a throne of black ebony with three steps running round the visible sides of it. The chair on the throne has lilac cushions.

These two walls are high and disappear above the stage curtains. The corridor room,

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

however, shows rafters of dull red, and from these rafters hang banners and standards of many colors. Some are in shreds and ribbons, being hard won battle relics.

Perched on the cushions of the throne is an old decrepit Chinese King, almost in his last death throes.

He is not visible to the people in the corridor room.

Behind his throne stands his physician who hands him some medicine in a silver cup. He takes it with trembling hands, and drinks it with a gasp. The cup tinkles on the floor. Out in the corridor his ministers are kneeling with heads bowed to the floor, perfectly still.

The only one that is standing is the Chief Minister of the Court.

His position is far enough down stage to command a view of both the chamber and the dying King.

The Chief Minister approaches the King obsequiously.

Minister Again thy pleasure O King!

King I die!

Minister It may be decreed.

King It is decreed. *(He gathers himself up to say this with hollow strength and then falls back. The Physician makes a slight start*

THE ROSE GARDEN

- Minister *of alarm*). I must die happy!
May you live to see the new throne room built—the throne room that is to surpass all others. Then your great soul may pass away in pleasure.
- King I shall *not* live. Know ye that death seizes not me. I am embracing it Imperially!
- Minister I have anticipated the pleasure of your Greatness. (*Makes a half step forward*). Your Mightiness, I have got the builders to make an exact model of the throne room—showing it even as it will look when completed—inset with many gems and colored to the resemblance. May they bring it?
- King (*After looking almost vacantly for a few minutes, nods his head*).
- Minister (*Makes a slight sign, and one of the kneeling figures rises and tears out madly but silently. He reappears with two men carry-*

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

rying a model of Oriental architecture. It is a very beautiful piece of work).

King *(Raises himself wearily to look, assisted by his physician. He fixes the model with a piercing glance and says with infinite scorn:)* Is that all it will be! It is well I die before you build such!

(The Minister quickly ushers them away with the model and they scramble out quietly but hurriedly amongst the kneeling figures).

King *(To Ministers)* Is that how you embitter my last hours?

Minister We have flowers of all kinds. Shall we bring them?

King Bring me only roses—roses.
(Minister makes a sign and handmaidens bring in a pale green sheet of silk full of roses).

King *(Makes a sign).* Scatter them!
(Handmaidens drop the roses all about he throne).

Minister Shall these maids dance? They are the prettiest girls in your

THE ROSE GARDEN

kingdom.

(The King gives no sign, but the Minister signifies that they should dance).

(Some musicians have crept in behind the flower girls and they now sit at the right wall and play as the girls dance. After a few movements, the King with feeble rage:)

King Stop! Is this how you mock my Imperial end?

(The dancers fall upon their faces on the floor. The musicians also. There is silence).

Minister *(After a pause).* Shall one sing?

King Sing? Yes, sing, but sing only of roses. *(The first dancer rises and a small lute like instrument is handed to her. She sings sitting).*

Singer Have you seen the roses
 Kiss each other
 And twine in amorous affection
 The white to the red
 The red to the white?

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Have you seen the roses
Kill each other
Stabbing with thorn-like swords
As the breeze sweeps them
through
And their red petals drop like
blood?

(The King apparently dozes and the dancers and musicians withdraw, singing the refrain softly).

(A trumpet sounds).

(The King awakens).

(An officer appears at the head and whispers to the Minister as he has joined him).

Minister O, King! The noble Captain of your Host is outside wounded almost to death. Great trophies he brings.

(The King nods. Enter the Captain of the Host, supported by two officers. He is very weak and pale from loss of blood,—almost as incoherent as a drunken man. Gripped tightly in each hand, he has the torn banner of opposers. His ar-

THE ROSE GARDEN

mour and clothing is hacked to shreds).

Captain O King! O King! (*He sobs weakly*), they are all slain—the raiders of your fair kingdom, and I die for you. (*He lurches forward and would fall at the King's throne but for his supporters*).

King You foolish man—die for me? I die for myself.

Captain My duty—

King Your duty is to live, not die. Any fool can die. I have *lived* and now I will my Imperial end. But I must die happy!

Captain O King! (*He falls, and the wounds bleed afresh*).

King See, he bleeds among my roses! (*The Captain is now insensible and is borne out. A bassoon-like trumpet sounds in the distance*).

King Who dares to break the decreed silence of my City?

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- Minister *(To watchers on platform:)*
 What is this?
- Watch A troop of players.
- Minister Let the soldiers throw them into
 jail.
- King Bring me their leader.
 *(The leader of the players is
 brought in. He falls flat before
 the King with forehead in the
 dust).*
- King Name?
- Player Too Foo.
- King You lie. Too Foo is dead.
- Player He is dead, but he lives in me.
 I am his son.
- King His son! Come nearer me. My
 speech grows weak. *(Player
 draws nearer).* Can you speak
 me of your father's play,—The
 Rose Garden?
- Player Yes, your Imperial Highness.
- King If you please me you shall name
 your own reward.
- Player That shall be as your Greatness
 wills.

THE ROSE GARDEN

King *(Beckons his Minister and whispers to him. He nods. Starts, and looks at player almost with horror,—but the look subsides. He leaves rapidly, but returns).*

King Let us have music.
(The Musicians form up the center of stage, but in the corridor room out of sight of the throne). During the music enter three men dressed in black—all about the same height and thin. They all wear short black cloaks so that their arms are not visible. Their skulls are quite clean shaven. They fall flat before the King's throne. The King beckons the leader of the three and whispers. To do this, the King tremblingly stands supporting himself by shoulder of the sinister attendant who makes no sign, though once the whites of his eyes show and he nods almost imperceptibly).

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

(During this, the Minister takes the Player to right side of stage by wall and says:)

Minister You need refreshment, stranger?
(Claps his hands). (Two servants enter. One with wine and fruit. Player seats himself on the low seat, and eats some fruit and drinks wine. Second servitor comes forward with a gold bowl of scented water and a lilac silk towel. Player with all dignity uses them. Attendant offers him a pipe with bowl as big as a walnut and a stem about three feet long.

This while the other scene is being enacted on left of stage).

King Now!

Player *(Prostrates himself before the King).*

(The three sinister black figures cross the stage and stand with arms folded against the gold wall at right).

King Come nearer! *(Beckons player*

THE ROSE GARDEN

to steps of throne). I wish you to speak from this play because certain memories stir me. (*Dreamily*). She was seated at the play, and wore a rose in her hair. I had her followed with the request that she should be brought to me. (*A silence*).

Player O Great One—She came on the wings of the dove.

King (*Nods*) — and my Imperial father had her executed (*suddenly*). Now speak the speech. (*Music sounds through this. The Player is standing very near the throne*).

Player How oft she looked over the
grey wall
And saw not your coming,
The wall of the Rose Garden.
Her little white hands hung down
Among the red roses
Playing idly with their petals
And you came not. (*Advances
nearer the throne*).

All day the sun kissed her cheeks
And you came not.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Then when night fell
How black the roses looked
Until the moon rose and showed
Crystals hanging from their
petals
Crystals that were her tear
drops. (*Music stops*).

(Player advances right to the steps of the throne and speaks very quietly).

And when the morning came
Low hung her head over the wall
And her lovely raven tresses
Were entangled in the thorns.

And they buried her among the
roses

For you came not. (*He bows very low*).

King (*With trembling hands rises*).

And they buried her among the
roses. (*Trembling, he stands*).

Player! Player! Your reward
is great! (*He makes a sign*).

(Two attendants unroll a sheet of pale yellow silk about six feet wide which effectually closes up the entrance to the corridor room.

The three black figures advance. Two seize the player's arms from behind. The

THE ROSE GARDEN

arms which emerge from their cloaks are bare. They draw him back from the throne, in such a position that his head is thrown back and his neck bared.

The third black figure throws off his cloak, and is revealed bare to the waist.

The music plays wildly behind the silk screen, and the hidden attendants sing a sobbing rise and full accompaniment, as the third black figure slowly strangles the Player to death.

The King totteringly walks down the steps with ecstasy written on his face, his whole body shaking with exultation and quivering arms outstretched).

King Your reward— Your reward!
(The strangler releases his grip and the limp body drops into the arms of the King).

Your reward—to die with a King. (Their bodies fall entwined amongst the roses).

Minister)

) The King is dead!

Physician)

(The music stops, the yellow silk veil is dropped, and with a great wailing, all rush from the

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Palace.

The two bodies lie amongst the roses in the foreground).

The King in his death throes clutches to his breast a large red rose).

CURTAIN

The
Blue
Vase

A Chinese
Play
In Free Verse

CHARACTERS:

A KING

A HANDMAIDEN

A BLUE VASE

SCENE IS LAID IN ANCIENT CHINA

The Blue Vase

THE curtain rises revealing a lofty room about the depth of eight feet only—representing more a corridor than a room. Its construction is very solid—being of black ebony.

It is lighted by an oblong window in the center wall. There is also a small circular aperture in the ceiling which admits a diffused circle of yellow light as it is entirely covered with a lemon colored glass as a protection against the weather.

The oblong window center has no glass or bars, but flung back against the walls are two plain ebony doors which when closed would successfully seal this sanctuary—for sanctuary it is. A sanctuary containing a huge Blue Vase which stands exactly in the center of the oblong window and immediately under the circle of diffused yellow light.

The Vase is of handsome proportions—standing about five feet high, further eminence being given it by elevation on a small platform or rostrum which has the dignity of a throne.

The platform is constructed of black

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

ebony and has two steps leading to it. The steps are very solid and broad but only about fifteen inches high.

The Blue Vase is absolutely plain—having no ornamentation whatever—no arms, pattern or design. It owes its absolute loveliness to symmetrical proportion, and to its beautiful blue color—full toned and rich.

It is evident that this sanctuary is constructed on the edge of a mountainous precipice. The oblong window without doubt looks out upon a sheer drop of some thousands of feet. The next mountain is seen almost like a perfect miniature painting enclosed by the window framing, bisected of course by the Blue Vase in the foreground. The floor of this room is black—carpeted by a kind of black felt so that no falling footstep can be heard. On the right hand side of the Blue Vase is a tiny frail couch, lacquered a pale yellow, fitted with a little silk mattress and roll pillow of mole colored silk—whilst on the left is a twisted stand of most irregular shape, which holds suspended at its pinnacle, a tiny glow lamp, boat shape. The stand is four feet high and has a solid metal foot. It is the color of red bamboo. The two doors leading to the room are right and left. They are very narrow, being scarcely two feet wide

THE BLUE VASE

and nearly as high as the walls of the room itself. The solid doors hinge from the corridors outside. The thickness of the walls can thus be seen.

On the room side a long silk flame—orange colored curtain hangs on the left side of each doorway—the folds draping to the floor. Just above the couch hangs a huge bronze gong about three feet in diameter, and underneath is suspended a huge ebony hammer.

Fully half a minute before the curtain three strokes sound on the gong—then the curtain rises very rapidly.

The couch is occupied by a diminutive Chinese girl. She is intensely pale and sits immovable with legs crossed, facing front. She is dressed in pale yellow watered silk. Her hair is plainly dressed after the Chinese fashion. After the curtain is up there is a dead silence for fully a minute. Then without moving she speaks—at first a little haltingly:

SHE How do I love him?

 I cannot tell.

 When I was a child

 I marvelled at the mountains

 And stood in fear of their greatness.

 I saw the sea one day,

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

And could not sleep
For nights,
Because of its immensity!
But when I look at this love of mine
It is so wonderful,
And so huge,
That a mountain seems like a pebble
Thrown idly away by a playing child,
And the sea, a tiny dew drop
Hanging on a grass blade
Or a branch, waiting for a bird
To drink it.

Beside my love
All things that were great before
Are now so small
I should not miss them
Were they away!
Except—except two things
The sun, and the song of a bird.
The sun, because I could fling
My naked soul on its hot bosom
And burn out my desire.
The bird song because it
Tells the song of my love.

The door at left opens and the King enters. He is dressed in a long close fitting

THE BLUE VASE

gaberdine or tunic. It is of grey green with self color designing. A black silk cap is on his head and his feet are encased in dull silver slippers. He has a girdle with a sword. He is very tall and aged about forty-five years. The buttons on his tunic are alternate silver and turquoise, and on the third finger of his left hand he wears a blue ring. His fingernails are long and gilded. As the door closes behind him, he stands gazing enraptured at the Blue Vase. He sits on the platform or throne and addresses it caressingly:

KING Thou hast soothed me
 Unruffled my cares.
 A friend or consort
 Could do no more—
 Could not do so much!
 Why do I worship thee?
 Is it for thy beauty,
 Color, shape and wondrous curves?
 And if so, are not these
 Reasons enough?
 Thus men love their steeds
 And love the curving
 Limbs and bosoms
 Of their mistresses.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Thou art more then all these,
For in loving them
I might still baser be,
But in loving thee
The more exalted do I become
And less desire have of the world.
(He pauses in contemplation a few moments).

When first I placed thee in this shrine
I was mad with possession
But now life holds
A calmer joy for me,
Here have I installed thee
Safely away from vulgar
And misunderstanding eyes.
Here have I built thee
A worthy shrine
And here do I in contemplation
Find that which the world has lost.
(A pause during which he sits with drooped head, then without looking up, he says:)

HE Sing to me little one:

SHE *(Takes a little square lute from behind her couch and sings:)*

THE BLUE VASE

When the rough winds
Sweep among the willows,
As they lean tenderly o'er the stream,
Then their strong boughs
Clasp the waters with their arms
Like a passion swept lover,
And their leaves suck up
Dewy kisses, like the loved one
From the moist mouth of his mistress.

HE *(Frowns and claps his hands for her to stop, and rises, giving her a long piercing glance. He slowly passes from the room, but turns at the doorway and says:)*
Do you still love your task, little one?

SHE I still love—*(She drops her eyes)*
my task.

(He is about to leave once more, but returns to the vase and, mounting the steps of the throne, touches the slender neck of it with his lips. He turns yet again at the doorway, and sternly).

HE Sing me no more songs. *(Exit).*

(Immediately he has passed from sight, she strikes a discord on her lute and rushes across to the Blue Vase).

SHE Thou thing of Hate!

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Why do'st thou rob me of his love?

(Flings herself down sobbing).

(After a while, she collects herself and speaks again).

Mine is the greater beauty

He shall see. *(Runs to couch).*

I'll wear this red rose in my hair,

These coral beads around my neck,

These ear-rings, and this perfume.

(She adjusts them and looks into her mirror, and quickly adds a little color to her cheeks, powder, etc., as the light fades out to note the lapse of time).

.

(When it gets lighter it will be noticed that the sun is on the wane. The light through the window at the back is now a bright orange. She is in her original position on couch).

SHE Near sun down

And he does not come.

If he comes not, then the night

Will seem a thousand years.

But if I could spend the night

In his arms, the time would seem

But a candle flicker .

(He enters).

THE BLUE VASE

HE What is this strange unrest?
 (Sees her).
 Well do you keep your watch
 These two years.
 Now you should be seventeen.
 Never have you let the lamp go out.
 Never in the day have you slept.
 You do your duty well.
 No one but we two have entered
 This sanctuary.
 Should you fail me
 Death hideously devised
 Shall be your punishment—
 This you know, little one,
 Do you not?

SHE *(Coming forward).* Yes, my Lord.

HE What! What! Do you disobey
 My hest and wish!
 What means this rose?
 What means these vulgar orna-
 ments?
 Take them away!

(She removes the ornaments in an almost listless way. Finally she removes the rose, and as she does so, her hair falls about her and the rose drops in petals on the

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

ground. At the same moment, she takes the other half step which brings her absolutely level with him eye to eye).

SHE I am sorry to offend, my Lord.

HE What strange perfume is this?

SHE It is the perfume of my hair,
Or my skin.

(He does not move, and she timidly slides her hands in his).

HE I am tired. I am dizzy.

What force impels?

(She backs away slowly to couch—ever so slowly, still holding his hands, and with her eyes fixed on his. He follows almost in a dream. She seats herself one end, and he slowly seats himself on the other. The light through the window has turned to the rose red of sun-set).

HE *(Repeating).* The perfume of your skin!

(She bares her chest and throat by undoing the three top buttons of her tunic, and he passionately kisses her chest and throat. She clutches her arms tightly around his neck and holds him there, whilst she sings again, crouching:)

When the rough winds
Sweep among the willows,

THE BLUE VASE

As they lean tenderly o'er the stream,
Then their strong boughs
Clasp the waters with their arms
Like a passion swept lover,
And their leaves suck up
Dewy kisses, like the loved one
(She loosens her arms)

From the moist mouth of his mistress.
(He kisses her on the lips).

SHE Oh, my loved one! *(She now sinks in his arms).*

HE Is this the end of my unquiet?
Is this the end of all paths?
Is this the path I would not tread
Because I feared?
And hugged to myself a higher joy?
(Pause).

Is there anything greater than this?

SHE *(Murmurs).* No! No!

HE There *must* be another way,
Something greater—nobler—
Full of pure joy.

SHE Kiss me.

HE If this were all,
Mankind would have paused here
And strayed no further.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Do you beautiful women
Lead us up, up among the stars,
Or do you prevent our attainment?
Tell me?

You are of this matter
And must be one with its secret.

SHE I know only that I love,
This my couch by night,
My throne by day
Witnesseth it.
By day, my thoughts
Play wanton with the sun-beams
And find only you.
By night my thoughts
Wander among the stars
And I find but you.
I wondered why it was so
But now I know.
You were mine already.

HE The paths I have trod
Have brought my spirit rest
Calmness to my soul.
But with you little one
Whither, whither?

SHE I will calm your every fear,

THE BLUE VASE

Bear all your sorrows,
Share the every ill
That Fate may bring—
HE Stop, I have heard that before.
(*Dreamily*) 'Twas at the foot of
a purple mountain
On the strand of a lake.
Silver streaks stirred the waters.
It was thousands of years ago.
But could not believe,
And so thus was I born.
Born not trusting friends,
Born not trusting women.

(*His hands now play amongst her long
raven hair*).

Why should we try to believe
That this is something worth
When we know that it is nothing-
ness!

SHE What matters what it is
So that we are together?

HE What matters!
To find this smiling face a lie,
This lovely heart cankered at its
core,
This honest friend,

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

Not even an honest enemy!

(Pauses in meditation).

Why should I take up these threads
When Contemplation hath given me
Such bliss, and exalted me
Above these things?

SHE Yet you said you suffered unrest?

HE But was that unrest from within?
My soul has flown to such heights
Of Contemplation that I know
It came from without.
You bring me to another world.

SHE Yes, the World of Love.

HE Yes, the World of Love
I have heard it called
Where men haggle
For pieces of metal,
And sell their souls' security.
Where women sell their love
Themselves, and their lovers.
Where they leave their trusted one
And rove more butterfly like
Than the butterfly
After new fancies. . . .
After I have scorned

THE BLUE VASE

And abjured all this
You would bring me back!
And yet—and yet—
Is love worth its agonies?
What is this
Faint stirring of music within me?
SHE It is the eternal Song of Love.
HE Or the sweeping chords of passion.
SHE Passion and Love
All, all that matters!
There is nothing more—nothing!

(During this speech, the oil lamp on stand flickers).

HE Nothing. *(Slowly kisses her lips two or three times).*

SHE Nothing. *(The lamp goes out).*

HE *(Rising with alarm).*

The lamp is out!

SHE *(Trying to drag him down).*

We can kindle it again.

HE No! No! Now I see! I see!

We have played the wanton,
Never has that flame perished,
And while *that* burnt
The flame within me leapt.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

(He moves from the couch. She clings tightly, and he drags her with him. He unloosens her hands and throws her backward on the floor. She cries aloud, and at the same time he speaks:)

HE You—You—neglected your task
 And dragged me from my height.
 Out, Out, from this!
 Never more will I trust you.

SHE *(Clutches his feet bedewing them with her tears).*

 Lord—Master—Beloved!

HE *(Turns abruptly).*

 Let me contemplate.

 Light the lamp . . .

 If when I leave my reverie

 You are here, death comes to you
 tonight.

(Trembling all over, and with stifled sobs she takes an oil bottle and relights lamp. Still sobbing she picks up her little square lute which she trails brokenly after her. At the door she turns appealingly, but utterly broken. He pays no attention to her, for he is sitting on the floor by the Vase—his hands covering his face—like one in prayer. Her eyes travel listlessly round the room like one in stunned sorrow endeavoring

THE BLUE VASE

to take a last look at a familiar scene. They light upon the gong with the huge ebony hammer. She stiffens and a look of determination comes into her eyes. Almost in one sweeping movement, she crosses the room, and takes the hammer, and with her face convulsed with hatred, raises it with both hands, and shatters the Blue Vase. He only raises his eyes in time to see the consummation of the deed. He emits a great cry.

She tremblingly drops to the floor on her knees.

The hammer falls from her hands.

He advances and stands over her with both fists clenched, but they fall powerless by his side, for she does not move).

HE *(Hollowly and brokenly).*

Now strike the gong:

Let them come from all parts of
the palace

And rend you limb from limb!

(She does not move. He flashes out his sword and she slowly bares her neck to receive the stroke. He raises the sword, but again his arms fall powerless).

HE *(With a great cry:)* My world has
gone!

(He plunges the sword into his own breast, and falls among the debris of the

CHARACTERS:

RIGHT PROLOGUE

LEFT PROLOGUE

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

THREE ROBBERS

A TARTAR

NOTE ON THE COSTUMES AND PROPERTIES

THE two Prologues are dressed exactly alike in long Persian gabardines of a prevailing snuff color.

The Right Prologue wears a small turban of dull red and scarlet slippers.

The Left Prologue wears a small turban of dull blue and bright blue slippers.

The two Eunuchs wear large turbans of bright orange and dull gold loin cloths, for the rest they are nude with well oiled skins.

The Man with the Bundle is dressed in bright red rags, which he can shed entirely.

The Three Robbers are dressed in bright green rags, small black turbans, and they wear large black rimmed spectacles.

The Tartar is dressed in orange yellow with a close fitting red cap and brown shoes.

The books are bound in purple.

DESCRIPTION OF SCENE

Walls of cellar are tope; floor black.

The narrow staircase, which runs up to center door, is blue.

The doors are red with rust, and fitted heavy iron bolts.

Prologue

(BEFORE CURTAIN)

Enter Prologue R. Enter Prologue L.

RIGHT (*To audience:*) O Notables!

LEFT (*To audience:*) O Fools!

(*They both stop*).

RIGHT Who engaged you to speak this
this prologue?

LEFT The Author!

RIGHT A fine author!

LEFT I agree with you.

RIGHT Well since we agree I'll speak
the prologue—

O Notables! (*Reads from script*).

LEFT O Fools! (*He has no script*).

RITGH (*To left:*) This is impossible.
Two of us cannot speak a pro-
logue.

LEFT The author made two speak a
prologue before.

RIGHT Then it is obvious he cannot re-
peat himself.

LEFT Still less can he repeat others.

RIGHT I wish he would, then the public

THE PROLOGUE

might think him clever, for they like authors to repeat themselves.

LEFT Yes, but it takes a clever author to repeat himself and always seem the same.

RIGHT You are so obvious.

LEFT Obviously so! Why do you have a manuscript to read your prologue from?

RIGHT Why have you no manuscript?

LEFT Because my speech begins, "O Fools!" and yours beings, "O Notables!" You need a lot of rice paper to prove people are notables, and nothing to prove they are fools!

RIGHT Let us leave it to the audience.
(*To audience:*) Shall I speak the prologue, O Notables?

LEFT Or shall I speak it, O Fools?
(*Two sets of voices clamour from the audience*).

RIGHT What is that?

LEFT That is the Notables clamouring

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

to be called "Fools," and the Fools clamouring to be called "Notables."

RIGHT You are wrong again. It is the Fools calling themselves Notables because they are in the cheaper seats, and the Notables calling themselves Fools because they paid more when they might have seen the play for less money and bought rice with the residue.

LEFT Or opium.

RIGHT The same thing! they both bring us one step nearer the grave.

LEFT Only rice does the more harm; it makes the way to the grave longer.

RIGHT *That's not your own thought, you stole it from the author. It sounds like his style. I believe it's in my manuscript. (Looks).*

LEFT You needn't look. The author has no thoughts of his own to

THE PROLOGUE

steal.

RIGHT You insult the author! (*With rage*).

LEFT You are worse; you insulted the audience; that's much worse. You insulted them for spending money to see the play!

RIGHT It's always safe to insult authors. Besides, they are used to it and audiences are not.

(They are turned to one another enraged. Loud strokes on the gong. A handful of rice is thrown from right. Another from left. Two more in rapid succession).

RIGHT That's the stage manager throwing rice at us.

LEFT He may need it by the end of the week.

VOICE Come! Come! Come!
(Loud noise on the gong).

RIGHT Let them have their stage. How will the audience know what the play is about with no prologue spoken?

LEFT It doesn't matter; our author doesn't know what it's about in.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

any case!

RIGHT Very well, then! (*Threateningly*). Very well; I'll go straight to the author and get him to write an epilogue.

(They shake fists in each other's faces. Loud cries. Noise on gong. Two stalwart Eunuchs, nude and shining, wearing bright orange turbans, stride in from right to left. They seize the Prologues round the waist and stride off with them kicking helplessly).

The Play

SCENE: An underground Eating House in Persia; originally the basement or vault to an old palace, but now used as an eating place for thieves and questionable characters.

The Tartar is asleep in the left-hand corner of room.

The three Robbers are down front of stage seated on mats eating and smoking.

FIRST Is it certain that he will come tonight?

SECOND It is a certainty.

THIRD Nothing is certain; not even certainties.

FIRST He was here three months ago.

SECOND Also three months before that.

THIRD And, now he may have been dead three months.

FIRST And in three months we may all be dead.

SECOND Or in three minutes.

THIRD Why not; for see how much happier we should then all be.

FIRST That being so, let us all kill ourselves.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- SECOND Or kill each other?
THIRD Why not kill him?
FIRST That brings us to where we were in the beginning.
SECOND There is no beginning.
THIRD Every beginning may be an end.
FIRST Like the end of a rope.
SECOND But a rope has two ends!
THIRD Or two beginnings?
FIRST But only one middle.
SECOND Which can be made an end to.
THIRD Made two ends to.
FIRST And thus, two beginnings.
SECOND Let us make an end of him.
THIRD To him.
FIRST That cuts our circle, (*Relights pipe*).

(A pause while they smoke).
SECOND Why did we not kill him before?
THIRD Because he still lives.
FIRST And because he would not let us.
SECOND And we were afraid.
THIRD Afraid of him?
FIRST Afraid of ourselves!
SECOND Afraid for ourselves.

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

THIRD Therefore he lives and we perish.

FIRST No one perishes if there is aught to do.

SECOND If there is aught to do, we still live.

THIRD But yet we die.

FIRST We die to reach the end of our troubles.

SECOND But there is no end to our troubles.

THIRD Like the rope.

FIRST And the *middle* of it all is life.

SECOND And so we live by thieving.

THIRD And so may he.

FIRST But his bundle is never bigger.

SECOND It is small, but never smaller.

THIRD Then the treasure must be big because the bundle is small.

FIRST But he never speaks.

'SECOND It is only when a thing is too big or too small that we never speak about it.

THIRD But we *see* it.

FIRST Not if it is too small.

SECOND Or too big!

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- THIRD And if things are neither big, or small, but medium, then we must see them.
- FIRST We see nothing! We see over them, under them, round them and through them, but not *in* them.
- SECOND Shall we never see in his bundle?
- THIRD No!
- FIRST No?
- SECOND No?
- THIRD No; because first, we must open his bundle to see *inside* it, and once it is opened it ceases to be a bundle.
- FIRST As a man once dead ceases to be a man.
- SECOND And becomes a reproach.
- THIRD Yes; a reproach to Nature.
- FIRST Should we then reproach ourselves for killing him?
- SECOND No; we might reproach ourselves for *not* killing him.
- THIRD For not killing him *sooner*.
- FIRST Or later!

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

SECOND Or for not letting *him* kill *us*.

THIRD Perhaps he would not want to.

FIRST He would if we had the bundle, and he had it not.

SECOND But then we should not want to kill him.

THIRD Then he should give us the bundle.

FIRST He will do so, for we will take it.

SECOND When he is dead.

THIRD We give him Death in exchange.

FIRST What a *Vast* thing to give for so little.

SECOND We should have killed him before this.

THIRD No; if we should we would.

FIRST And then we could.

SECOND But we could not!

THIRD And why could we not?

FIRST Because he never spoke.

SECOND Then he is very wise.

THIRD For only the wise keep silence.

FIRST Even the wise cannot keep silence when there is no silence to keep.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- SECOND Then they join in the din.
THIRD And make it less.
FIRST Because the voice of the wise
quietens the tongue of the foolish.
SECOND Then foolish tongues must make
make for wisdom.
THIRD Yes; everything foolish arrives
at where it never set out for.
FIRST Then the foolish are wise?
SECOND Yes; for then they cease to be
fools.
THIRD But *we* are fools.
FIRST Yes; fools not to kill him!
SECOND No; fools for letting him live!
THIRD The same thing!
FIRST Not the same thing. I let my
father live but not because I
do not kill him.
SECOND Can we be overheard.
THIRD Yes; by our audience.
FIRST Then they will not like us.
SECOND Then we shall not like them.
THIRD But we have to speak this.
FIRST And they have to listen.

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

- SECOND They may leave us.
THIRD We may leave them.
FIRST Then there will be no play.
SECOND There will still be a play.
THIRD But they will not hear it.
FIRST Then they will be glad.
SECOND Yes, glad; because it is not nice
to hear what you do not like!
THIRD But if they like it?
FIRST Then they will be glad.
SECOND So shall *we*.
THIRD So stay, or go, we make them
glad.
FIRST Shall we stay or go?
SECOND Let us do both.
THIRD How can we?
FIRST Stay now and go when we finish.
SECOND But we cannot finish until we
kill our man.
THIRD He is not our man.
FIRST The man with the bundle.
SECOND The man with *our* bundle.
THIRD Then we must get it.
SECOND (*Listening*). He is here.
THIRD He is not, but will be.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

FIRST He will not be here soon, but his
body will. (*Draws a dagger*).

(*The three stand up simultaneously drawing daggers*).

FIRST Let us enter when he is asleep.

(*They exit at right. A tapping is heard and door at top of steps opens. The Man With the Bundle enters. Tartar awakens and runs to door at right, listens and runs back to staircase. The man with the bundle on his back comes down steps very slowly*).

TARTAR A good night!

MAN The night is not good. No night
is good. Night is bad, a bad
substitute for day. That's why
we sleep at night.

TARTAR (*With admonition*). Do not
sleep tonight.

MAN Then must I sleep in the day.

TARTAR No, you will sleep night and day
forever!

MAN Fool, there is no forever.

TARTAR There is "ever."

MAN Yes ever *and* ever, *and* ever, *and*
ever.

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

TARTAR And ever?

MAN Yes; that is why you have to add *and ever*. So you see there is no eternity, for when you add one "*and ever*" you have to add another "*and ever*." It does not matter how many "*and evers*" you add, you are still just as far away from eternity as you were in the beginning. (*As he enunciates each phrase he takes one step down. He is now on the bottom step*).

TARTAR Do you want to live?

MAN Here is a coin. Buy food. You live to want.

TARTAR You speak better wisdom than they did. (*Points to door at right; jingling coins*). Your wisdom is more objective, and you have made me your dependent.

MAN (*Coming down last step*). No; I have made you independent.

TARTAR And yet, I will warn you.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- MAN You cannot. I know already.
 (Indicating door left). They
 want my bundle?
- TARTAR *(Nods several times)*.
- MAN If they want it long enough
 they will get it.
- TARTAR *(Trembling)*. I'm afraid.
- MAN So am I. I am more afraid than
 you because I do not show it.
- TARTAR I'm going.
- MAN I shall stay.
- TARTAR *(Begging him on knees)*. No,
 go—if you are afraid—Master.
- MAN I never run away when I am
 afraid. That is the only time
 when one should stay. Besides
 it's so simple.
- TARTAR *(Trembling)*. Oh I'm afraid—
 so afraid!
- MAN Of them?
- TARTAR *(Getting up and backing away
 from him in a circle as the man
 turns)*. No! No! of you—of
 you *(his back is now against
 stairs. He runs up the stairs*

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

*backwards with distended eyes,
and hands held out like claws).*
—of you! you! you! you! you!
you!

(The door at top gives to his weight and he disappears in the blackness as it closes with a metallic clang. Instantly the door at right opens and three heads appear one-two-three, one above the other, and then disappear in rapid succession, one after the other. Another metallic clang. The man lifts his bundle off his back and uses it as a pillow, places the rush light at his feet and sleeps. The door at right opens slowly. The first robber creeps out with shoulders hunched. The second crawls out on his knees. The third on his all fours. The door clangs metallically. They all fall flat on their faces. The sleeper wakes, and after a pause, settles to sleep again. The first one gradually rises to his feet from the ankles up without touching the floor with his hands—like a cobra. The second does the same, but in a kneeling position. The third rises also but keeps his hands on the floor. They now speak in rapid succession, toning their speech in three keep like part singers, but subdued).

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

- FIRST You heard the Tartar tell.
SECOND And he is not afraid.
THIRD He sleeps on his bundle.
FIRST We must go away—
SECOND As if we leave for the night.
THIRD But return like new guests.
FIRST Striking on the door.
SECOND And when he opens it—
THIRD Strike! (*At the word strike, all rise and turn as one to left, and march upstairs. As they go upstairs,—loudly—*)
FIRST A bundle of rags is no good.
SECOND Only as a pillow.
THIRD And we have frightened him enough. (*All laugh*). E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E!

(*Three clangs on the door. Outside E-E-E-E-E-E diminishes and the night owl hoots*).

- MAN (*Raising his head*). Only the wise laugh, and only the wise never laugh in the wrong place. (*He settles to sleep again*).

(*There comes a timid tapping at the door. Then a rapping. Then three loud*

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

knocks. Then a Yit-Kim player is heard, the music pulsing and soaring upwards. The man rises, takes the long rush-light, and mounts the stairs. The rush-light is in his right hand, and his left is extended like a wire-walker's. He takes step by step, what time the music sobs and soars, and the owl hoots. When he reaches the top the door is snatched open and the three robbers are revealed, two with long knives raised, the third at back with Yit-Kim playing. The knives flash, the music throbs, the Owl hoots. The man throws up his arms and the rush and the rush-light with its porcelain holder crashes to floor, breaks, and plunges the whole place in darkness, and the man's body falls down stairs, and the door clangs metallically to. The body then is heard thudding down the stairs in darkness. The Yit-Kim plays on. First robber heard to run down stairs—thud—thud—patter).

SECOND (Thud-thud—patter).

THIRD (Thud-thud—patter). With a long discord on his Yit-Kim).

(Dead silence for a minute, then the flash of a light as First and Second simultaneously light a rush-light apiece.

The body of man is lying center, right to left.

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

*First stands at head, Second at foot.
Third stands on bottom step with Yit-Kim.
Bundle is down front of body.*

First and Second robbers have knives raised).

FIRST Very quick, open the bundle!

SECOND Yes.

THIRD (*Steps over corpse, laying Yit-Kim on body and opens bundle; the other two stand close on either side).*

(First and Second about to cut knot with their knives).

THIRD No! (*He unties knot and the contents fall out).*

THE
THREE Books, only books!

(The Yit-Kim plays mockingly, accompanied by a hollow laugh.

The Third falls forward on his face. First and Second fall back on floor, revealing the corpse sitting up playing and laughing mockingly).

You think that is all.

FIRST A God—

SECOND A Spirit—

and

THIRD A Wise Man.

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

MAN A student and philosopher.
FIRST A philosopher and a brave one.
MAN And a coward! Look at your
 knives and see how twisted the
 points are! (*Moves his rags*
 aside). A steel shirt that came
 from Damascus. The links are
 fine as silk."

SECOND And you said a philosopher!
MAN So I am, but my philoosphy is
 concretely objective and objec-
 tively concrete. (*Strikes his*
 mail shirt).

THIRD And only books. (*Turning over*
 volumes).

MAN Look at the wrapper. (*They do*
 so, spreading it out). Now turn
 it. (*They do so, wonderingly.*
 Cries come from them it is
 tissue gold).

FIRST What!

SECOND What is it?

THIRD What is it made of?

MAN The golden tissue of my dreams!
 (*He tears the rags off,—revel-*
 ing his mail shirt which gleams

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

like silver).

The silver thread of my philosophy.

(Holds out his arms and the robbers, as if in a trance, put the robe on him).

The Second hands his taper to the First and picks up the Yit-Kim, which has a long scarlet ribbon on it.

The Third picks up the books, largest at bottom and smallest on top.

The man turns to walk upstairs, followed by the robbers with two tapers—next the Yit-Kim player, and finally the Third with books. They speak as they ascend step by step).

MAN Come, filch not money from men,
but steal wisdom from secret
tombs and from the hearts of
the living. *(His gold robe trails
on the steps. Yit-Kim plays
very softly. At the top of steps
the man pushes open the door.
Rosy dawn is in the sky).*

MAN Who shall say the night has
ended and the day begins!

THE

THREE Oh say it, Master! *(He turns
on the top stair. The sky gets*

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

brighter and birds sing).

MAN Dawn awaits round the shoulder
of the world—waiting—
(The three breathlessly).

MAN Waiting for mankind to beckon
it, if they have the courage!
(The scene fades out in a rosy mist).

Epilogue

(When the light gets brighter the curtain is down and the two prologues are asleep right and left. They yawn and wake).

FIRST Is the audience still here?

SECOND Yes; they have more patience
than we have.

FIRST I slept through it all.

SECOND So did I. I'm so tired. Oh!
(Yawns). Too tired to renew
our quarrel.

FIRST Yes; if you call it a *(yawns)* a
quarrel.

SECOND I woke up towards the end and
heard something about "man-
kind beckoning the dawn."

THREE ORIENTAL PLAYS

FIRST Who is going to rise on the cold dark morning to "beckon the dawn." When you have to work you must get your full night's rest. Work takes all your time. It leaves you no leisure to "beckon the dawn," as the author calls it. Fine sort of author. Got more time than money.

SECOND Perhaps he likes play better work.

FIRST Who doesn't! What's that?
(Points to floor).

SECOND Looks like the leaf out of a book. See, it has gilt edges.

FIRST Let's read it. It will do as an epilogue and help the audience to understand the play, which is more than I do. *(Picks up leaf. Yawns. They both yawn. He reads:)* "He who can wear rags with comfort can wear fine clothes with distinction; and he who can wear fine clothes with

THE MAN WITH THE BUNDLE

comfort, can wear rags with distinction." (*Tears up leaf and yawns*).

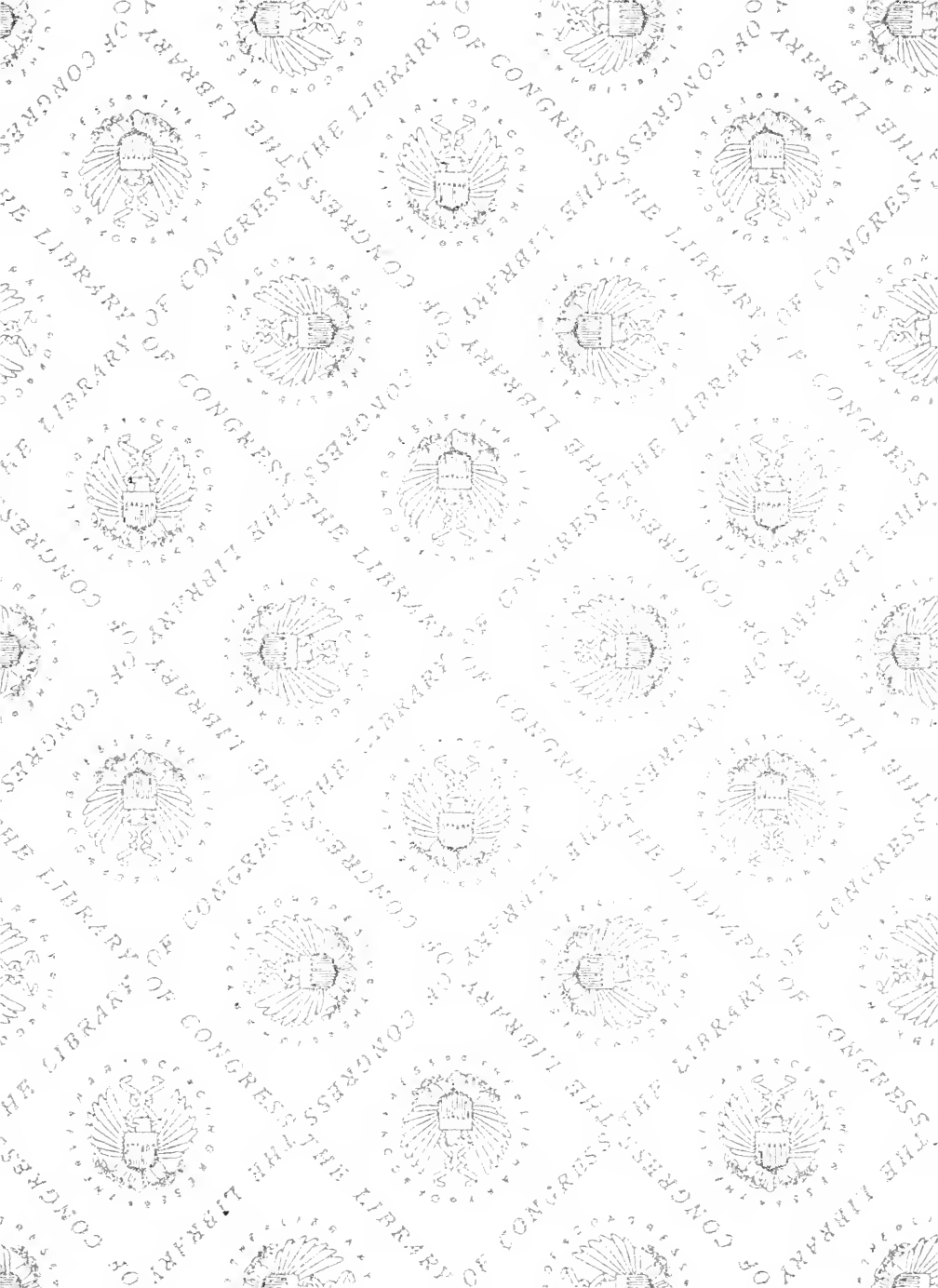
FIRST That leaves us as far off as ever.

SECOND Let's see if the stage manager will let us have a few coins to buy rice.

FIRST Or opium!

SECOND Both—both. (*They ignore audience and stroll off arm in arm*).

FINIS





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